

impossible to go into all the details but allusions seem to have been made to Mrs N's uncle seventy years ago in Edgebaston and two names of high significance when in conjunction, came 'out of the blue'. Much of the subject matter seems very appropriate to Mrs N in hospital before her death and some seems to describe her religious and philosophical outlook which in outline was well known to relatives and friends. It is perhaps a typically odd fact of this sort of script that the last few lines of the whole series should contain what appears to be an instruction from Mrs N to me as her executor in regard to a complicated and unusual legal difficulty over her Will. This is somehow tied up with Dorothy Kerin who from the script wording might perhaps have been acting as communicator. Miss Kerin died in January 1963 (about twenty-seven days before Mrs N) and this, including the difficulty over her Will, must almost certainly have been known to the medium sitting on 11 March, 1964. A dozen allusions in the script to legal difficulties could apply equally well to Mrs N and Miss Kerin, but there seems to be no way of telling whether the medium was drawing on a paranormal source in which the legal affairs of the two deceased persons were merged or whether he was merely recounting what he had heard or read about Miss Kerin. The difference legally is that Mrs N signed her Will which contained an ambiguity, whereas Miss Kerin failed to sign hers. This difference is not directly but is indirectly referred to in the script.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer was most fortunate in obtaining the help of many members of the Society in carrying out the large amount of work involved. The warmest thanks are extended to them since nothing would have been achieved without them. Thanks are also due to the Research Advisory Committee for timely advice and to the Council for a grant from the Research Fund to cover expenses of the sittings and transcriptions and for the use of the Society's rooms and tape-recorder for the sittings. I have also to thank several personal friends who helped me to re-annotate the scripts obtained with Mrs N's K-objects.

FURTHER LIGHT ON THE ANDERSON TESTIMONY

by R. G. MEDHURST AND K. M. GOLDNEY

It is unfortunate that the 'Anderson Testimony' has come to play such a disproportionate part in the discussion of Sir William Crookes's researches into psychical phenomena. Even Mr Trevor Hall has called attention to its relative unimportance. That he felt the need to devote a whole chapter of his book, *The Spiritualists*, to what he somewhat portentously called 'Later Revelations about William Crookes' makes it painfully clear that he had to bolster up a weakish case with every available scrap of evidence.

The material in the Society's files relating to Anderson has recently been made public, some of it in the *S.P.R. Journal* for June 1963, and the remainder in an Appendix to an article by us in *Light* for autumn 1964. It will be recalled that the 'testimony' consists of an account by Anderson of a liaison which he claimed to have had with the medium Florence Cook, then Mrs Corner, during the winter of 1892-3. A statement was made by him to Dr Dingwall in 1922 when the latter was Research Officer of the S.P.R. It is unfortunate that Dr Dingwall made no proper record of this interview, and doubly unfortunate that he made no attempt to check verifiable details of Anderson's story. In 1949 Anderson gave a very long account, presumably containing the same information, to Mrs Goldney which she wrote down from memory as nearly as possible in his own words; shortly afterwards he met other S.P.R. officials, and dictated and signed his own statement.

In the article in *Light* already mentioned, we have discussed some of the weaknesses in Anderson's testimony. Since then, a further very interesting discrepancy has come to light through the perspicacity of Mr Conan Shaw.

What one might call the high spot of Anderson's story (duly reproduced, though without the Society's formal permission, in Hall's book, and made much of by reviewers) was his account of the initial seduction scene. Mrs Goldney (see *Light*, autumn 1964, p. 137) recorded him as saying:

She was very highly sexed, and I can remember the scene of how it all started as if I saw it now. There was a large hall with a staircase leading upstairs and bending to form a sort of square as it ascended, so that one looked down into the hall from above. In the drawing-room was a piano at which the daughter was practising. Mrs Corner

told her she must practise well, and she would leave the door open, so that she could verify that she was doing so. She came to me in the dining-room downstairs and said 'I know what you want I think' and went upstairs. Shortly she leaned over the bannisters and called to me 'Frankie, Frank'—'Come up'. I went up and she called me into her room and I found her very much undressed on the bed! And so it all began.

It shows a curious failure of critical alertness that nobody (including ourselves) before Mr Conan Shaw thought of checking the truth of this part of Anderson's story. Mr Shaw wrote to the present occupier of the Corners' house and had a very interesting reply to the effect that the arrangement of hall and staircase was quite different from that described by Anderson.

In April of this year, two members of the S.P.R., Mr Benson Herbert and Mr Manfred Cassirer, very kindly volunteered to go to Wales to make a personal inspection. Their report, and the photographs taken by Mr Cassirer, seem quite conclusively to demonstrate that Anderson's description of the scene is totally incorrect.

It will be recalled that Mr and Mrs Corner and their two daughters lived in a house called 'Usk Vale', in Usk, Monmouthshire, in the early 1890's. Anderson commented: 'They had a nice, commodious house with grounds to the river bank and fishing rights. They were in fairly easy circumstances, but in the salmon fishing season Mrs Corner took in P.G.'s.' Charles Blackburn, the wealthy Manchester business man who had formerly sponsored Florence's mediumship, was also living in Usk at his death in 1891, in a house called 'Oakfield'. For the next few years this house was occupied by Florence's mother and her two sisters. It is clear that Anderson was asserting his visit to have been to Usk Vale, rather than to Oakfield, since he remarked: 'She had two sisters . . . living near Usk with a wealthy old man named Blackburn . . .'

Usk Vale is now known as 'Island House'; its present owner and occupier is Mr H. S. Stephens. The two halves of its former name, 'Usk' and 'Vale', can still be seen one on each of two brick pillars at either side of a gate leading to the house. Mr Herbert's and Mr Cassirer's report reads, in part, as follows:

There is a small brook on one side, and river on the other, so it is an island. From boundary fence to river is about 50 yards. The common is used as a playing field. . . . M. C. took photos of staircase, hall and exterior, and to us neither staircase nor hall bore any resemblance to Anderson's description. The stairs are perfectly straight and view of their upper part is occluded by low ceiling which showed no evidence

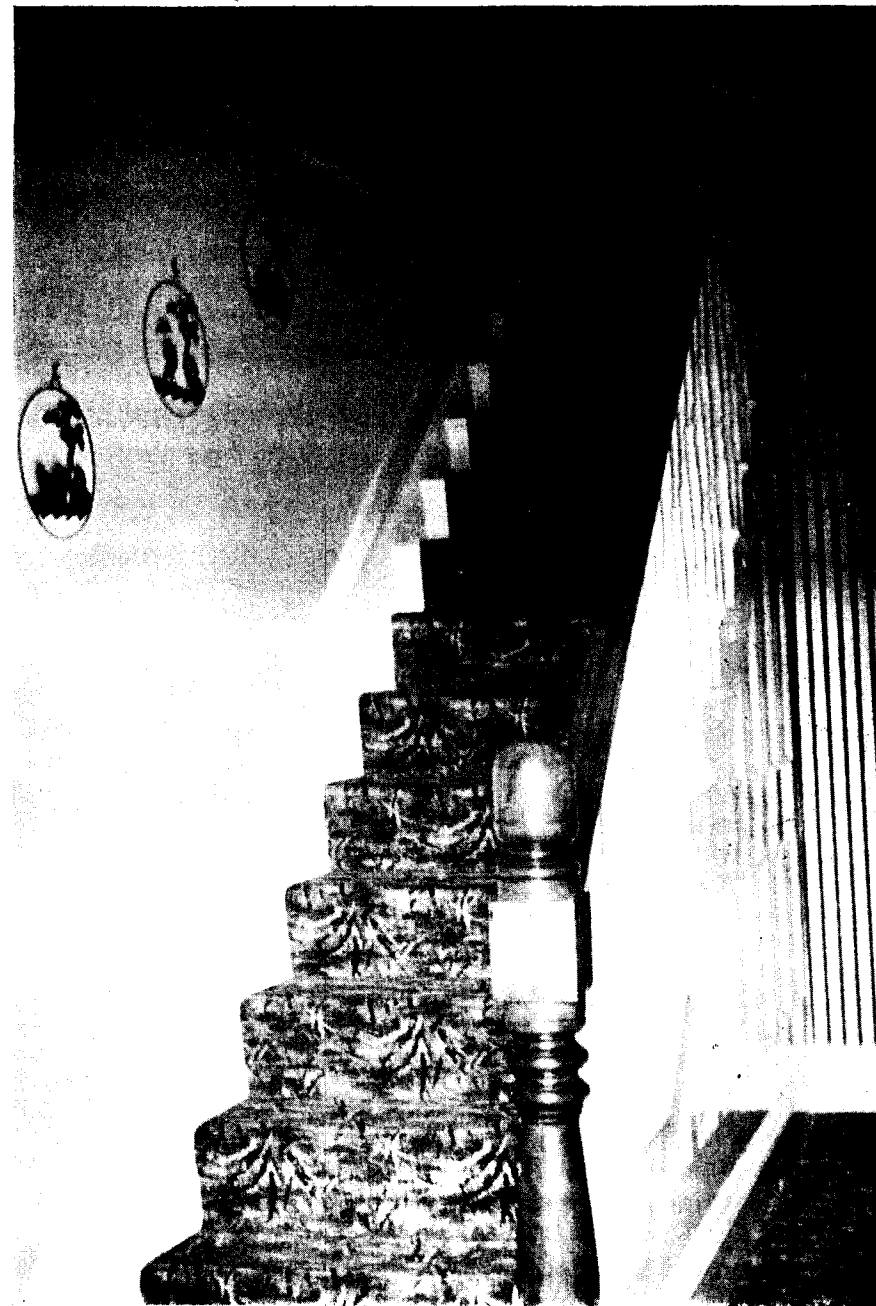


FIG. 1

of being a later addition. Continuity of moulding was pointed out by Mr Stephens, who said that as far as he knew no alteration had been made. The hall is quite small . . . there is salmon fishing in the Usk, and there would very likely be fishing rights in 1890, though now there are none. It is likely that there was no boundary fence then (from my general knowledge of common land in Wales: B. II.). Mr Stephens permitted M. C. to walk right up the stairs.

Mr Cassirer's photographs of the staircase (Fig. 1), the hall (Fig. 2), and of the exterior of the house (Fig. 3), are reproduced here. It is clear that Anderson was describing either an imaginary scene or one in a different house.

As already indicated, Oakfield, Blackburn's house in Usk, seems, by Anderson's own statement, to be excluded as a possible location for the alleged seduction. However, Mr Herbert and Mr Cassirer felt it advisable also to view the hall and staircase of Oakfield. They report as follows:

The property is large and more imposing, with stables and outhouses. (Much more 'commodious' than the more modest 'Island House': M. C.) Short drive to house with large rear garden: nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from River Usk. . . . The hall again bore no resemblance to Anderson's description: the stairs went up on right side, then bent to left, but were then immediately out of sight. It is thus not possible to imagine anyone above being able to see the hall without actually hanging over suspended by the ankles. This hall is about the same size and shape as at Island House.

Evidently the episode in the hall, 'the scene of how it all started' that Mr Anderson could remember 'as if I saw it now', must have been largely imagined or invented. The same must be said of another crucial point in Anderson's story, namely his account of fraudulent spirit photography supposed to have been carried out by Crookes with Florence's assistance. The absurdity of this has been pointed out by Dr Thouless (*S.P.R. Journal*, September 1963, p. 142: see also the article in *Light* for autumn 1964, referred to above). Some of Anderson's other factual detail was certainly at least partially correct (such as his references to Blackburn and Florence's sisters: a subsidiary point verified by Messrs Herbert and Cassirer is that there is a Sessions House in Usk, as stated by Anderson). In the article in *Light* we have suggested possible sources for some of this local colour.

It has not perhaps been sufficiently stressed that there are two quite separate elements in Anderson's story, namely his assertion regarding Florence's promiscuity and the statements he attributed to her concerning Sir William Crookes's complicity in fraud. The first is really none of our business, and the publicity that has been

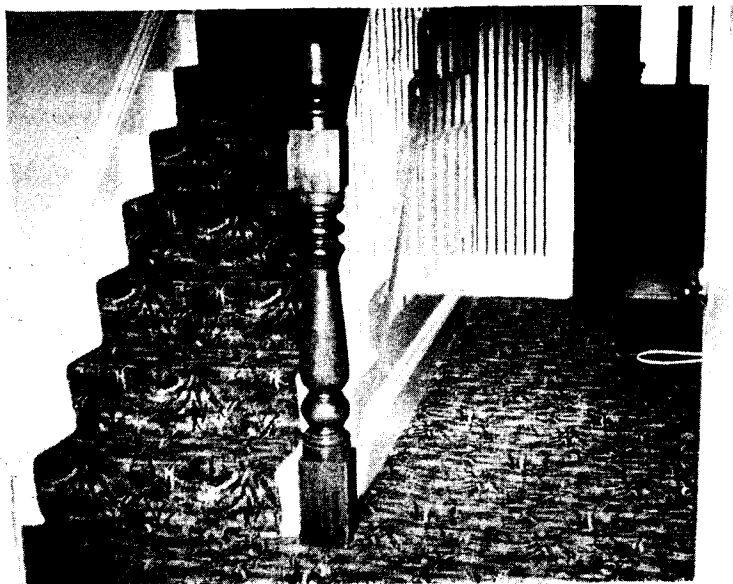


FIG. 2



FIG. 3

given to the somewhat salacious details of the staircase episode seems to us in questionable taste. It is at least clear that those who find an absorbing interest in the condition of Florence's morals must seek more reliable testimony than that of Mr Anderson or of M. Bois, who told a similar story of an association with Florence. As for the allegations against Sir William Crookes, it was already obvious, in view of Anderson's palpable invention regarding the fraudulent 'spirit photography', that they must be regarded with reserve.

In summary, we would say, as we have said elsewhere, that a quite disproportionate attention and emphasis has been given to the 'Anderson testimony'. When Mrs Goldney made her detailed record of the testimony, Anderson was relating memories of events more than half a century before. In view of the inaccuracies that have been brought to light, some may choose to disbelieve the whole affair, from beginning to end. Others may admit distortions of memory to have taken place whilst considering his account of a liaison with Florence Cook to be based on fact. What is certain is that his whole tale could be omitted altogether without affecting, one way or the other, our judgement of the value and validity of Sir William Crookes's testimony to physical phenomena and to Florence Cook's mediumship in particular.

REVIEWS

WITCH DOCTOR: TRADITIONAL MEDICINE MAN OF RHODESIA
By Michael Gelfand. Harvill Press, London, 1964. 191 pp.
30s.

SHAMANISM: ARCHAIC TECHNIQUES OF ECSTASY. By Mircea
Eliade. Translated from the French by Willard R. Trask.
Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1964. xxiii. + 610 pp. 45s.

This very interesting and unusual book describes the work of the *nganga*, the name given to their physicians by the Shona who live in Mashonaland in what now is Rhodesia. Professor M. Gelfand is attached to the Medical Faculty of the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. He was born and brought up in Africa and has a wide knowledge of and sympathy for the Shona, dealing with their manners and customs in an understanding way which is as rare as it is refreshing.

In his account of the works and beliefs of the *nganga* Professor Gelfand records how close he found the association to be between them and the physical and spiritual lives of their patients. Neither

physically nor mentally abnormal those *nganga* whom the author knew well proved to be pleasant and stable personalities with good emotional control and often of higher-than-average intelligence. As important and esteemed members of the community these physicians were active in supporting the principles at the basis of Shona education, namely correct behaviour, good manners and discipline, a code of conduct leading to the idea that what is really important in Shona society is a consideration for the feeling of others.

Although many *nganga* live in urban areas where they practise their herbal and other treatments, many live in rural districts and it is thought that there is perhaps one to every 800 or so of the population.

Since the Shona believe that disease is caused by spirits or by persons wishing to do them evil, one of the first tasks of the *nganga* is to diagnose the disease in order to discover whence the evil influence has come and then to prescribe appropriate herbal medicines to alleviate the physical damage incurred by the sufferer.

Although the patients themselves are inclined to believe that it is to the *nganga*'s potent remedies that they owe their cures, the physician himself often ascribes his powers to a kind of spiritual endowment which is derived from the spirit of some deceased relative and thus, like Western unorthodox healers, holds the view that his knowledge of the right remedies to prescribe is due to the spirit from whom he obtains information in various ways.

This close association of the *nganga* with the spirits is seen in the cases of possession in which the physician passes into trance and then shows his powers of clairvoyance, divination and the faculty of finding lost objects. In some cases the diagnosis points to possession of the sufferer by an evil spirit, and here the treatment consists in exorcising the patient, the entity concerned being driven into some animal or fowl which is then let loose in the woods. When it is the *nganga* himself who is controlled, his behaviour varies with the kind of spirit which possesses him. With the departure of the spirit and the return to normality the *nganga* will yawn, stretch himself and appear to awaken as from sleep.

Professor Gelfand is of the opinion that the trance state is akin to what we call a hypnotic condition, although in the case of the Shona the trance may last for as much as ten hours or even more. Yet, even if there are differences between the Shona trance and that found among Western mediums, it seems clear that both conditions belong to the same group of phenomena, and it is here